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Robert S. Allen - Paul Scott Report

STATINTL

Red China May Free U.S. Prisoners

WASHINGTON — There is an outside chance Red China has at long last decided to liberate the five Americans serving long sentences on phony spy charges.

Basis of this glimmer of hope is a meeting in Warsaw this week between Ambassador Jacob Beam and Ambassador Wang Ping-nan — the 102nd of these deliberations that have been underway since September 1955.

Because the Communist envoy sought this latest session, hope has revived that the long-imprisoned Americans may be freed.

When he submitted this request to Beam last week, Wang Ping-nan gave no hint as to the reason for it. They last met on October 16, without any results or the slightest indication that other meetings would be any more productive.

STATE Department authorities conjecture that with the Christmas season approaching, Peiping may be preparing to make a spectacular propaganda gesture by liberating the imprisoned Americans. However, it is readily admitted this is merely a surmise.

Secretary of State Herter has directed Ambassador Beam, in his conference with Wang Ping-nan, to again stress the following three U. S. stands:

(1) Release of the five Americans; (2) exchange of newspaper correspondents with no

strings attached; (3) renunciation of the use of armed force in the Formosa area. The Reds have persistently balked at all these demands.

PRESIDENT-ELECT Kennedy has been surprised at the latest Warsaw meeting and approves of it.

He is also represented as favoring continuing these discussions, but possibly on a different level. Beyond that general thought, his views haven't crystallized. But it is a problem he plans to ask his secretary of state to personally consider and submit recommendations.

During the course of these five-year-old exchanges, the Communists have twice tried to stuff them to the foreign ministers level.

THE FIVE-YEAR-old meetings were agreed to by the U. S. on assurances that all American prisoners would be freed. Twenty-three were released in 1955, within a few months after the talks started. But the Communists have steadfastly refused to liberate the other five on the ground they were convicted of espionage.

The parents of two of them, John Thomas Downey, New Britain, Conn.; and Richard Fecteau, Lynn, Mass., have been admitted to China to visit them. Downey and Fecteau are Army civilian employees who were captured during the Korean war. Charged with being spies, Downey was sentenced for life and Fecteau given 20 years.

The other prisoners are Bishop Walsh, Washington, D. C.; H. F. Redmond, Yonkers, N. Y.; and Robert McCann, Altadena, Calif. Redmond and McCann are businessmen who also were accused of espionage. The former got life, and the latter 15 years.



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